

## **Evanston area takes dim view of lights**

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By Lisa Black, Tribune staff reporter

Evanston officials acknowledged that the city failed to notify residents within a historic district along Ridge Avenue of its plan to install modern traffic lights that could spoil the character of the street known for its lush canopy of trees.

Now aldermen fear that the resulting controversy could cost them nearly \$1.9 million in federal funding as they stall the project and attempt to ease residents' concerns. "I just feel we made the mistake here and ought to rectify it," said Ald. Arthur B. Newman (1st) after four hours of debate in a meeting Monday that drew about 60 people.

The council members chose to let stand a temporary moratorium on construction of the new traffic lights at 12 intersections between Church and Mulford Streets while they work with area legislators and the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency on modifying the plan.

At issue are proposed "mast arm" traffic lights that city and state engineers maintain are safer for heavily traveled roadways, such as Ridge, which carries 20,000 cars a day. But residents prefer the current "post top" traffic lights. Post top lights stand closer to the curb than mast arms, which extend over the middle of the street.

The Illinois Department of Transportation is overseeing the project, about which residents first learned in mid-April when workers began digging at the intersections.

On Monday, one resident presented a copy of the city's original application for federal funds for the project, showing that the city failed to check off a box identifying the area as a historic district. The application also indicated that there was community support for the project, referring to "informal meetings" that had been held.

Public Works Director David Jennings conceded that residents were not notified of the plan and that "informal meetings" referred to regular City Council meetings during which members approved the traffic lights.

"Everybody up and down the line probably made mistakes," resident Vera Chatz said.  
"Obviously the next step is to go to the state and try to get a waiver [to change the plan]."

U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky, who lives on Ridge in the historic district, also opposes the plan and is working to maintain the post-top lights and federal funding, according to her staff.